

Introduction

One of the most magical places on earth, Nepal's majestic mountain peaks, deep ravines, breath-taking scenery, unparalleled sunsets and cascading waterfalls, have rightly earned it the title of **Mountain Kingdom**. The appeal of the world's highest mountain – Mount Everest – often hides a people who are amongst the poorest in the world.



History

For centuries the land now known as Nepal was divided into many principalities. In the mid-1700s one of these principalities, Gorkha, first overthrew the rulers of the fertile Kathmandu valley and the lands beyond the present-day borders of Nepal.

In 1846 Jung Bahadur Rana became Nepal's first prime minister, wielding absolute power, setting up a system of hereditary prime ministers, reducing the monarch to a figurehead and pursuing a policy of isolating Nepal from external influences. This resulted in protecting the country from colonialism but also impeded economic growth.

A democracy movement overthrew the Rana regime in the 1950s leading to the appointment of a non-Rana as prime minister. A period of multi-party rule followed during which the monarch, assisted by political parties, governed the country.

In 1959 a new constitution was issued and the first democratic elections held. However, the following year, the king dissolved parliament, arrested the prime minister, and political parties were banned. The Panchayat system of government was introduced, forcing a one-party system on the country. Protests were severely dealt with and the Nepali people suffered under a regime that had one of the worst human rights records in Asia.

In 1990 King Birendra agreed to large-scale political reform and created a parliamentary monarchy with the king as head of state and a prime minister as head of government.

Since 1991 elections have been held but have been marked by frequent changes of government. Maoist rebels wanting to establish a Communist

republic have been waging a campaign against the constitutional monarchy. Since 1996 12,000 people have been killed in the conflict and a further 100,000 people displaced.

In May 2006, following widespread conflict, Nepal, formerly the world's only Hindu monarchy, was declared a democratic secular state by the Nepal House of Representatives. His Majesty's Government was renamed the 'Nepal Government' and the Royal Nepalese Army, the Nepal Army.

Historic elections took place peacefully in April 2008 in which the Maoists secured a majority. It seems as though the country may be about to enjoy a period of peace and stability that Nepalis have not enjoyed for some time.

Current challenges

- ▶ Almost eight million people out of Nepal's 25 million people (40 per cent of the population) live on less than 60 pence a day. Around 48 per cent of children under five are malnourished.
- ▶ Nepal continues to be in disagreement with Bhutan over the repatriation of over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in camps in Nepal. The refugees in Nepal originally fled violence in Bhutan in the 90s.
- ▶ Human rights abuses, such as the use of torture, the disappearance of people after detention and abduction – at least 1,600 – and the killing of innocent civilians, are allegedly routine for both the Nepal government and Maoist rebels.
- ▶ Nepal has huge environmental problems including deforestation, vehicle pollution in Kathmandu, the capital, and encroachment on animal habitats.

BMS involvement in Nepal

BMS World Mission has been involved in Nepal since 1958, initially just with the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) but, during the 1990s, BMS personnel have also been working with the International Nepal Fellowship (INF) and with the Nepal Baptist Church Council (NBCC). The work is varied – health, education, development. During the 1990s Nepal became the country where the highest number of BMS personnel worked and there are currently over 15 long-term workers in Nepal. BMS is involved in the following projects:

Kathmandu International Study Centre (KISC)

BMS teacher Judith Ellis is the principal of KISC and works alongside BMS teachers Andrew and Kate

Kohn, David and Jenny Browell and Becky and Dan Parnell.

Patan Hospital

BMS GP Katrina Butterworth works as an outpatient's supervisor at the hospital.

Multipurpose Community Development Service (MCDS)

Martin Butterworth is a BMS engineer working with UMN. Tlana Hnamler, originally from Mizoram, is an engineering consultant working with MCDS. Also from Mizoram is Lalringa Pachuau who works as a non-formal education consultant for the MCDS.

Human Development and Community Services (HDCS)

HDCS is one of BMS' newer partners – Ian Chadwell works here as a management advisor to the health programme which now runs five former mission hospitals in Nepal.

Primary Study Centre

BMS worker Sarah Pryor is a teacher at the centre in Surkhet.

INF Surkhet Programme

Megan Barker is involved with the Surkhet programme in occupational therapy. Her husband Alan supports this programme administratively.

UMN

BMS mid-termers Alan and Anne Penn work with UMN. Alan is Funding Management Co-ordinator and Anne works in the personnel department, responsible for expatriate recruitment. BMS nurse Christine Preston works with the UMN co-ordinating work in clusters.

UMN Rupandehi cluster

BMS doctor Suzanne Walton and her police inspector husband Marcus are based in the town of Butwal in the district of Rupandehi in their work with the UMN cluster there.

Background Information

The land

Only 120 miles from north to south, Nepal is a country of spectacular beauty, with ten of the world's highest peaks, including Everest, within its borders. Its mountainous terrain, steep-sided valleys and swift-flowing rivers all make travel difficult within the country and have historically contributed to its isolation.

Due to great differences in altitude, Nepal has five climatic zones, including tropical, temperate and Arctic.

Around 80 per cent of the population is involved in agriculture, which accounts for 40 per cent of the country's Gross Domestic Produce (GDP).

Civil war and a lack of natural resources have prevented the country from developing to its full capacity.

Religion

Until 1990 Nepal had harsh laws which were brought to bear on those changing religion. Over 80 per cent of the population is Hindu with a smaller Buddhist (ten per cent) and Muslim (four per cent) community. Although people are free to choose their own religion it is illegal to convert others. Infringement of this law can lead to imprisonment or expulsion of foreigners.

Although the Christian community is very small (under two per cent) and has suffered greatly under the old laws, the church is growing at an enormous rate. It is estimated that there are at least 500,000 Christians in over 3,000 congregations. Willingness to suffer for their faith, prayer, church planting and evangelism have all contributed to the remarkable growth. There are currently 90 Baptist churches in Nepal with over 12,000 members.

Prayer points

- ▶ Give thanks for the number of Nepali people coming to know Christ. Nepalese Christians can face severe persecution for their faith. Pray that they'll have the endurance to stand strong despite the opposition.
- ▶ BMS personnel are helping to make a tangible difference to the lives of many people living in extreme poverty. Pray for God to continue to use them to bring his compassion and wholeness to the broken.
- ▶ Give thanks that the April 08 elections were peaceful. Pray that whatever happens now will have a positive effect on the nation, bringing long-lasting peace.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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